## DUCKCREEK

## Golden Anniversary Renovation

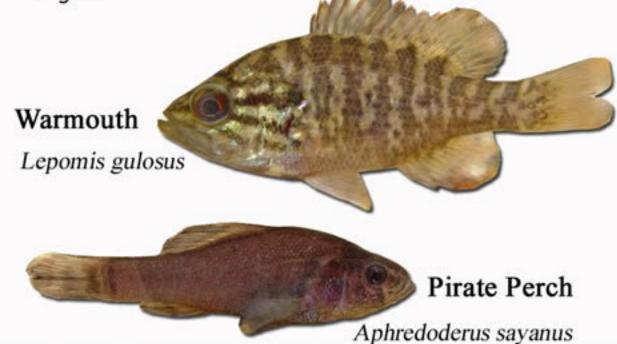
## Militant Swamp Fish

Yep, that's right, this month I'm going to focus on war-faring swamp fish. I know, at first it sounds off the wall, but bear with me. You might learn a few golden nuggets of scientific knowledge that you can tell your buddies during a slow day in the blind next fall.

There are more than 50 species of fish that call the Mingo Basin home. They each have adapted to the slow moving backwaters that historically would rise from the weeds and spread out under the trees each year. A couple species that come to mind have somewhat peculiar names.

The Warmouth is a common species that you may incidentally find on the end of your fishing line every now and then. It is in the sunfish family. Some say that it has the head of a bass and the body of a sunfish. The Warmouth is sometimes confused for a Rock Bass or Goggle Eye. This fish also goes by the name of Stump-knocker, Weed Bass, or Mud Bass along with a few others. As the nicknames imply, this fish resides in heavily vegetated habitats with muddy bottoms.

Like other critters it has cryptic coloring that helps it hide amongst the weeds and murky water. It has a distinctive pattern that covers its back. On its face it has 3-5 reddish-brown streaks that radiate from the eyes. These markings kind of look like war-paint, which is where the name, Warmouth, originates.



The Pirate Perch is a smaller fish and probably less known than the Warmouth. It too has coloring that helps it blend into its environment. Although at first glance it may appear to be just a dark little fish, these little guys can take on a deep purple to almost burgundy color, which is kind of striking.

The Pirate Perch has another adaptation for swamp life that you might find interesting and bizarre. As Pirate Perch grow and mature their anus migrates from the front of their anal fin to under their throat. Why this occurs is not exactly certain. One theory is that it helps with the placement of egg masses in and among leaf litter and woody debris.

So where does the Pirate Perch get its name? Now that you know more about its biology, is it because, like pirates, this fish doesn't have a clean mouth? Well, the name was coined by an early ichthyologist in the late 1800's. Charles C. Abbott observed this fish eating only the other fish in the aquarium. So the answer to the riddle is that the fish's violent disposition towards other fish led to its name.

All right, thanks for sticking with me on this. So why should you care about these war mongering swamp fish? Here's the connection. These fish rely on the zooplankton and aquatic invertebrates that migratory waterfowl key in on at different times of the year. They also eat the smaller bait minn'rs that also munch on the zooplankton and bugs. However, these tenacious swamp fish fall prey to other resident swamp species like hooded mergansers, snakes, herons, and game fish (like bow fin and crappie). They are all a part of the swamp food web.

At Duck Creek, we manage a diversity of habitats by manipulating water levels to mimic natural flood regimes. This varying hydrology across space and time keeps these food webs connected and allow the system to crank so that we can all enjoy the species of our choosing.

Author: Frank Nelson Photographs: Dave Ostendorf Resource Science Division, Missouri Dept. of Conservation

